THE PRACTICE OF FREEMASONRY AS A SOLVENT FOR WORLD PROBLEMS

Being the second section of the discussion of the question: Is Freemasonry Playing Its Part in Promoting the Welfare of the World Today?

The fourth of a series of articles discussing our ancient fraternity and present day problems.

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Is Bro. Hungerford justified in his contention that Masonic principles fearlessly applied would solve the problems facing us today ? Could Freemasonry exercise a real influence in the world? Have Masons forgotten their fundamental ideals, so that while doing reverence to the Landmarks in word they neglect them in deed? Is Freemasonry a Fraternity or merely a social organization? Is it universal or only to some extent international? In short, Whist is it ad about, what are we doing and what are we trying to do? Can anyone tell us?

HOW AMUSING and absurd it is to have some "nervous Nellie" in our Fraternity protest that the Landmarks of Freemasonry forbid the discussion of religion in our lodges or other strictly Masonic circles. If this were true, our entire ritual would have to be revised and most of its principal tenets recast in order that our official ceremonials might not transgress our own traditional principles.

Surely no member of the Fraternity will deny that our ceremonials are discussions and demonstrations of religious and ethical principles from beginning to end. Every formal Masonic lecture is a discussion of religious ideals and an admonition to religious practices.

What our constitutional rules actually prohibit is the discussion of sectarian questions or doctrinal religious issues.

There's a world of difference between discussing a disputed doctrinal problem or a sectarian religious question and discussing the application of those broad religious principles which Freemasonry professes to uphold and to practice to the various problems which are disturbing the world today.

I am dwelling upon this fact because it seems quite necessary to get this particular point fully cleared up as we attempt to consider the pertinent question as to whether or not the principles and purposes of Freemasonry, if properly practiced, might become a solvent for the distressing questions with which our civilization is faced.

Let me remind you that I stated, in my previous article, my contention that our Fraternity contains in its basic aims and objectives, the principles and program which, if sincerely practiced, generally and regularly, by our members throughout the world, would actually prove a solvent for all the serious social difficulties of our times.

Putting it plainly and boldly, I believe with all my heart and soul that, if Freemasons throughout the whole world would begin to practice the principles and precepts which the Fraternity professes and

teaches, we would set into motion such forces for human betterment that it would mean, ultimately, the solving of every present day problem.

You may regard this as a too bold and, possibly, too idealistic a prediction. But, I hope, you will at least give it due consideration.

In the first part of this particular discussion, I quoted from more than a score of persons prominent in world affairs, showing how diverse are the views as to what constitutes the foremost problem which our world is facing today. Yet I think we may be able to devise a fairly simple outline of the three principal world problems which will be sufficiently broad and comprehensive to include every major problem of our times.

Peace, Prosperity and Progress; Our World Problem

Suppose, for instance, we regard the promotion of peace, prosperity and progress as the three-fold problem of the world. This, of course, must mean universal peace, the prosperity of all mankind and the progress of all humanity everywhere. Surely, you will observe, if we provide a program and a plan that will promote all these, in the broad universal way we have outlined, such a plan or program will include the solution of all the major as well as the minor problems named by our correspondents.

Will any Freemason dispute the statement that the central tenet of our creed and the backbone principle of our Craft is the profession and the practice of universal brotherhood? In every degree, our ceremonials impress this central theme. Every emblem and symbol of the Craft relates to this central ideal, either directly or indirectly. Our reverence for the great Architect of the universe, the Father of all mankind, is simply the basic idea or the main root supporting this central trunk of our Masonic tree. The acknowledgment of our common Father of all mankind presumes the practice of universal brotherhood.

I am not pretending that Freemasons, as a rule, are practicing the principles of universal brotherhood; but I do contend, without fear of contradiction, that the central ideal upheld in all our ceremonials as the most important endeavor for all candidates for advancement in our Fraternity is to profess and to practice universal brotherhood.

Putting my proposition into a nutshell, it is my firm conviction that the practical exemplification of a truly universal brotherly love, exactly as it is plainly advocated as the central theme of Freemasonry, would do more towards promoting world peace, and advancing the welfare and common good of humanity, than any other political plan or social formula that could possibly be devised.

It is "old stuff," of course, to complain that we do not practice what we preach. Every man and Mason has it dinned into his ears the fact that we poor, frail mortals are prone to make mistakes and fall short of living up to our pretentions and professions.

Are Masonic Lodges Stressing Superficialities?

So, please do not infer that I am merely trying to find fault because we, as Freemasons, are subject to the shortcomings which all flesh is heir to. My criticism is more pertinent and more serious. Furthermore, the flaw that I point out could be remedied, whereas only through the long painful

educational process of struggle and conquest, trial and error, failure and victory, will the common faults of our humanity be overcome.

What I am trying to point out and drive home is my personal conviction that most modern activities in our lodges are placing stress upon secondary matters and failing to emphasize, as effectively and fully as we should, the real Landmarks, the fundamental factors of Freemasonry.

We conduct high-pressure fund raising campaigns to build memorials and monuments. We play up the social features of our program to the limit. We rush batches of candidates through our degree mills and try to beat the records of our predecessors in office and outshine our sister lodges. All these activities are in accord with the progressive, competitive, strenuous spirit of our times. But, in making them our foremost and, frequently, our only definite objectives, it seems to me that we are departing much farther from the ancient landmarks of Freemasonry than we would by any possible discussion of religion in our lodge rooms.

What is the Central Theme of Freemasonry?

If the broad platform of brotherly love upon which the structure of our great Fraternity is established comes to be regarded merely as a pretty figure of speech and not a genuine working principle, a real fundamental factor of Freemasonry, it seems to me that it is high time for us to pause for a while that we may consider what being a good man and a Mason should really mean. If it does not mean, according to every intent and purpose of the founders of Freemasonry, that you thereby acknowledge your allegiance to the belief in universal brotherhood and the practice of brotherly love towards all mankind, then I have sadly misinterpreted what appear to me as plain statements of our professions of faith and practice.

If you still harbor the slightest suspicion that universal brotherhood is not the central theme of Freemasonry, let me suggest that you try to recall any portion of our ritual which does not set forth some ideal either directly professing or closely harmonizing with the cardinal virtue of brotherly love.

How Would it Work Out in Actual Practice?

Possibly, however, you may still wonder what are the grounds for my assertion that brotherly love, really believed and practiced, would act as a common denominator for developing the practical solution of every world problem.

Suppose, accordingly, that we attempt to analyze and resolve the ideal of brotherly love into some of its prime factors, or essential elements. As we have been dealing with our other points in groups of three, as for instance, the three-fold world problem, let us consider three elementary factors of universal brotherhood. These are by no means all the factors and, possibly, may not be the most important. Yet they will be sufficient, I trust, to drive home our point that brotherly love is the universal solvent for the ills of mankind.

Understanding, confidence and tolerance are the three great attributes of brotherly love to which I would invite your consideration.

You will readily observe that all of these elements characterize the true spirit of brotherhood. There always exists a bond of sympathy and understanding between loving brothers. Likewise, love that

endures must always be built upon mutual faith and confidence. Finally, there is, between those who bear true affection towards each other, a spirit of tolerance, which overlooks common faults and condones human weaknesses and shortcomings.

Now, suppose that throughout the whole world, among all the races and peoples of every country, there existed a world-wide spirit of real understanding, genuine confidence and true tolerance, would we be so fiercely concerned in fighting over petty partisan policies or battling for the conquest of either property or political power?

Can Our Remedy for World Ills Be Applied?

I am sure, however, that it is needless for me to argue that the world-wide practice of all the elementary attributes, relations and activities of brotherly love certainly would cure the ills of mankind. Doubtless, you will admit the efficacy of the proposed remedy, but, probably, you will insist that we are today a long, long way from finding a practical plan for the adoption and application of this remedy.

I do not deny that present conditions seem to indicate that this doubtful attitude is fairly justified by the facts. We may be, according to current indications, a considerable distance from world brotherhood.

But this does not diminish the importance of the point I have been attempting to present. Admitting that world brotherhood may be simply a far-off ideal for the many millions of mankind, yet we must also admit that, among the several millions of Masons throughout the world, this ideal is not, or should not be, something in the dim and distant future. In Freemasonry, the ideal of world brotherhood is something ever present and always advocated as a real working principle of the Craft.

If world brotherhood ever becomes a universal working principle, it certainly will have to have its beginning somewhere. It is my sincere conviction that the leaven of this great ideal already has begun its work in our great Fraternity. Too slowly, it may seem to us, it is working and spreading the beneficent ferment in its influence among the more thoughtful members of our Fraternity.

If this series of discussions, in which I am attempting to act as sort of a chairman, should lead a few more brethren to see still further light on the fundamentals of Freemasonry, and should thereby, through these leaders, instill in a few more lodges more emphasis upon the real and abiding factors of our Fraternity, I shall feel that I have not labored in vain.

Again let me remind the reader, that when we call these articles discussions, we mean that our principle objective is to stimulate contributions from those who may be interested. My own endeavor has not been to present an exhaustive treatise upon each topic considered, but rather to raise as many questions as may be possible, without making my article merely a questionnaire.

The editors of THE BUILDER will be pleased to consider any comments or contributions that you may submit. Do not hesitate to write if your views are at variance with the writer's. You should not overlook the slogan on the cover of THE BUILDER. Why not do your part to help make this magazine "An Open Forum for All the Craft."

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